

Statement of Chairman McCain
Hearing on Amateur Sports Integrity Act, S. 718
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

April 26, 2001

We are back this year to try to pass a measure that I am confident will receive broad support if it is taken up before the full Senate. The Amateur Sport Integrity Act, S. 718, which I introduced last month with my colleagues Senators Brownback, Jeffords, Edwards, and Fitzgerald, does two things: it amends the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act to make it illegal to gamble on Olympic, college, and high school sports, and it authorizes appropriations for the National Institute of Standards and Technology to fund the detection and prevention of athletic performance-enhancing drugs.

The Amateur Sports Integrity Act implements a recommendation made by the congressionally created National Gambling Impact Study Commission in response to the Commission's concerns about scandals in recent years involving college athletes, about the extent of gambling among college athletes generally, about the way in which legal gambling facilitates illegal gambling, and about the mixed message we are sending to our youth when we allow gambling on amateur athletics in one state while banning it in all others.

In its final report, the Gambling Impact Study Commission recommended that betting on collegiate and amateur athletic events be banned altogether. Senate bill 718 accomplishes just that. Just as the use of performance enhancing drugs threatens the integrity of amateur sports, so does gambling. Betting on amateur athletics invites public speculation as to their legitimacy and transforms student athletes into objects to be bet upon. Adding unwarranted pressure from corrupting influences to the pressures that these intensely competitive young people already feel is unacceptable.

Equally important, although the Amateur Sports Integrity Act bans legal gambling on amateur athletics, I expect that it also will reduce a substantial amount of illegal gambling as well. The relationship between legal and illegal gambling was addressed by the NGISC, which observed that "legal sports wagering — especially the publication in the media of Las Vegas and offshore- generated point spreads fuels a much larger amount of illegal sports wagering." I won't pretend, however, that closing the Nevada loophole on legal gambling on amateur sports will put an end to illegal gambling on these athletes and competitions. For this reason, I say to my colleagues who are backing a bill that has the support of the gaming industry and that provides additional resources to combat *illegal* gambling-- I agree with the intent of your legislation and appreciate your recognition that gambling on amateur athletics is a problem that must be addressed at the federal level. The direction of that bill, however, while perhaps acceptable as a complement, is not acceptable as an alternative to the Amateur Sports Integrity Act.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and to moving this legislation at the earliest possible time.